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ABSTRACT

The discovery of Canada means rolling out a new map, giving meaning to the land and its heritage. Experientially discovering Canada is at the heart of teaching and learning. It is necessary to balance experiential exploration with classroom and library exploration. In order to achieve this, the student must be a traveler. Programs that attempt to offer this balance are grounded in the notion that the student will never understand the writings of Canada's discoverers, explorers, and settlers without time to share in that experience of life in the bush. There are distinct resemblances between early travelers' reactions to the journey and those of modern writers. Specific program objectives should capture traditional ways of the North, inspire connection to place, and expose the inherent, intrinsic worth of wildlands. The experience also involves teaching camping skills, providing opportunities for socialization, and offering an enjoyable recreational setting. Water travel as part of the discovery of Canada is strongly advocated and is best with "big days" on the water with short stays at campsites. The guide complements physical and spiritual activities with readings or ideas and stories from the past. This paper suggests that with attention to roots, spirit, and imagination, the guide can help participants roll out a new map and find the so called "New World" that both baffled and was ignored by many Euro-Canadian ancestors. (LP)

CANADA EXPERIENTIALLY: EVERY TRAIL HAS A STORY

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Abstract

The travel guide helps the student unfold a new map rich in possibilities. The possibilities involve the discovery of place - Canada - through a cultural identification with travel heritage, a widening of one's place in time and a re-thinking of cultural assumptions. A whimsical introduction is followed by general and specific pedagogical concerns for the presentation of heritage travel. The references cited are specifically chosen to serve as variety rich, content rich starters list into Canadian travel/heritage literature.

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"I have rolled out a new map,
giving names to unknown
indentations. I am Canadian".[1]
Florence McNeil

We unfold our map for the trip. It's not new. It is tattered with cracks in the folds and obscured worn areas at its corners. Yet it all looks new to us, alive. The blue is the key. Fingers trace out a route of blue, of water, and do a subconscious hop at overland green intrusions. Details are examined with wide eyes. Then the eye looks outward, wider still. There are not many linear patterns-roads, settlements. It all looks sort of the same, green and blue, with occasional pencil lines and adjacent notes, like, "watch for trail to the left at the marsh. Do not go straight into marsh, must be winter route". There are some lakes with no name. We like that. It's both unsettling and exciting. We're in the bush and can travel in many directions. The bush is still largely a new MAP with unknown indentations. The real adventure here is, can we belong? The unknown indentations are both geographical and cultural. Technically it's all been discovered, but discovery remains. The question is, what is it that we seek? Is it to be over or against or with or of? What is it to be "of" a Place?

To its indigenous people, the bush was home. To our forefathers it was the New World. We are still looking for the New World, still hoping to have a discovery of Canada. We travel on water, true to the heritage of so much of this landscape.

We, Canadians, love our political and economic history, the cornerstone of University Canadian Studies. But if Canada is anything in particular, it is geography and bush travel. It is more David

Thompson and J.B. Tyrrell than Sir John A. MacDonald and Tommy Douglas. All Canada refers back to water travel. Only, we have a hard time admitting this. We prefer to think of Canada as if it were a Chile on its side. With the bump of the St. Lawrence Valley and southern Ontario narrowing down to a sliver at the western tip at Victoria. Edmonton and Whitehorse are mere anomalies. As for everything else, all that water, much of it remains the "country back of beyond" as Robert Service once noted, or the "country way back in" as recorded of Labrador trappers by 1930's traveller Elliott Merrick. This is the Canada we have to discover, Elliott Merrick's "*True North*".[2]

Sure there are lots of resource extractions and airborne toxins leaving their insidious marks. But despite this, there remains an integrity to Canada; a bush that remains, not a wilderness (a confused term from the beginning), but a "way of the North". This is the North that George Douglas, P.G. Downes and many of today's travellers were bent on discovering.[3] This discovery calls for an imagination that brings spirits to the landscape and allows for the "movement in time" that "takes us out of time".[4] Such that one can be part of the history, part of the discovery of Canada. Time, the concept, can lose much of its control over us. Time, as linear concept can become lost amidst the wide imagination for stories of the place relived and retold again and again. The trick is to know the stories and come to know the place experientially. What one discovers, is what novelist John Steffler writes about the ghost of Labrador explorer George Cartwright in his compelling novel, "*The Afterlife of George Cartwright.*"

Cartwright discovered,

> that time is like sound-that the past doesn't vanish, but encircles us in layers like a continuous series of voices, with the closest, most recent voice drowning out those that have gone before. And just as it's possible to sit on a bench in a city reading a book, oblivious to the complex racket all around, then to withdraw from the page and pick out from the cascade of noises the voice of one street vendor two blocks away, so for Cartwright it's possible at times to tune in a detail from either the past of the ongoing course of time and, by concentrating on it, become witness to some event in the affairs of the dead or the living. The more the stories of the land are known and told, the more time encircles us with its voices enlarging our present.[5]

Literary theorist, Northrup Frye asked us "where is here". This he suggested was Canada's central problem. "Who am I" is secondary.[6] But one can safely assume, he never went out to discover it. Certainly not to greet it. And, if he had, would he not have discovered, as expected given his Methodist background, the same "north", in 1838, fellow Methodist James Evans called, "a region of moral darkness and spiritual degradation".[7] The problem of discovery is not just a matter of a journey, it is a question of how is the journey to be imaginatively taken? To discover "where is here", firstly you must go there, and then travel with a reflexive, engaging spirit. This spirit of travel adds a challenge to both avoid the temptation of certainty that defines the land and peoples and to avoid as mindscape a binary distinction between civilized and savage. Our historical precursors who rolled out new maps faced this challenge in the "New World". As geographer, J. Wreford Watson wrote, "the geography of any place results from how we see it, as much as from what may be".[8] For some, the journey brought only a landscape as reproduced in their own minds. Canada was to be seen as an extension of the old world. For others, the journey brought a genuine meeting, an authentic complex communication of self and landscape. The latter involves an

adventure of journey to fit in and not "fill out" from an old world frame of reference. David Thompson, Gabrielle Sagard and trader George Nelson all come to mind as examples of a more complex "fit it" mindscape.[9] Alexander MacKenzie and John Franklin seemed lost in the old world, while actually in the "new" world.[10]

Anthropologist Robin Ridington wrote,

> I know...that I cannot dream up another culture that does not exist,
> but I also know that in order to understand...I must be willing to
> dream into it.[11]

For the discovery of Canada, we "dream into it". Unfolding the map; giving meaning to indentations. Those indentations on land we will seek; the indentations that speak of heritage and those indentations in our perceptual and conceptual framework that will come to be challenged. Where is here?

The following verse of Al Purdy can be played with here;

"A.Y. Jackson for instance
83 years old
half way up a mountain
standing in a patch of snow
to paint a picture that says
"Look here
You've never seen this country
it's not the way you thought it was
Look again"[12]

A subtle reworking:

Well, take the water traveller, for instance
young or old
well into the trip at the end of a portage
standing with map in hand
staring out on the lake
as if to say to a partner
"Look here
You've never seen this country
it's not the way you thought it was
Look again".
and together they look.

And so we can come to roll out a new map.

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What becomes the pedagogy for this discovery of Canada? Indeed, where is here?

Experiential learning is at the heart of this teaching and learning of place. The classroom and book learning will further the learners' knowledge, but not necessarily their comprehension. The student

may come to know more and more with library and lecture, but not deeper, not as a concrete apprehension. It is this deeper knowing, the concrete apprehension for the discovery of Canada that is the focus of travel. Though this discovery of place is easily lost in a vague, sensual, preconceptual knowing without the balance of some academic rigour, it is rare that classroom learning provides any clarity for the genius of a place. It is necessary to balance the experiential exploration and classroom/library exploration in our scholastic inquiry. The student must be also a traveller.

The program that attempts to offer this balance is grounded in the notion that the student will never understand the writings of Canada's discoverers, explorers and settlers without time to share in that experience of life on the land; even in a most fleeting way. As was suggested to Edmonton journalist Stephen Hume "Don't rely on books, you've got to go there".[13] The diary of Catherine Parr Trail, the recollections of the trapper, the verse of Archibald Lampman's Temagami, the exploration literature of David Thompson, the letters home of fur trader George Nelson;[14] for comprehension, all these demand we live for a time unfettered by our modern urban sensibilities and craft.

Jack Warwick noted that, "there are distinct resemblances between early travellers reactions to the journey enhaut and those of modern writers".[15] Particularly, one might add, for those modern writers who attempt to travel à la mode du pays. Today's journal writer with time to absorb bush and defamiliarize themselves from whatever scholastic, social or institutional routine has become commonplace in their lives, comes to see that like the earlier traveller, they too might be looking or "not looking" for the New World of back country Canada. A resultant cultural identification brings a richer grasp at the "time out of time" experience and, one's writing finds a home as part of a continuing Canadian tradition. In describing the writings of early North America, Wayne Franklin writes,

> And they often turned to writing with an urgency which suggests that it was a means of self understanding, an essential way of shaping their lives after the facts. They seem, too, to have been painfully aware of the many problems which language posed for people separated as they were from their own world.[16]

How relevant these words fit for the self propelled backcountry traveller/recorder of today who separates, for a time, from their urban setting.

The connection is hardly limited to Euro-Canadian ancestors, though perhaps easiest. The thought-world, material culture and lifestyle of Canada's indigenous peoples is most difficult to internalize without time to live lightly in the bush. The telling of the Windigo story by an evening winters fire, the attempted interpretation of native pictographs on a rock cliff face during a quiet break from the exhausting headwind paddle; these moments help conjure up another way of perceiving self with landscape.[17] Today, we tend to winter camp with a multitude of gadgets and synthetic layers bent on aiding in "survival". Still, as in the days of the Victorian admiralty's assault on the Canadian arctic so illustrated with the Franklin expeditions, we tend to travel in a "hostile" north.[18] The warm winter camping lifestyle of, say, Naskapi Cree peoples of the James Bay watershed, points to a camping method, not of survival but of comfort, with home. Here the snowshoer hand hauls the toboggan, camping in a large canvas tent with a portable wood stove.[19] Comparing this native lifestyle mode to the nylon tent or snow shelter cold camping experience, often ski touring related (a foreign travel mode) suggests a very different "map" to be rolled out, providing a very different way of looking at self with landscape. Perhaps a difference similar to that of Franklin's thinking of sublime North versus John Rae's or Stefansson's "friendly arctic".[20]

For the Outdoor Educator focused on the concrete apprehension for the discovery of Canada, capturing traditional ways of North, inspiring connection to place and exposing the inherent, intrinsic worth of wildlands are all specific objectives. Of course, teaching the necessary camping skills, providing a setting for positive social engagement and offering an enjoyable recreational experience are the obvious practices. But one's ideals need not, and indeed, should not come to match with one's practice. We should have some lofty goals. Given the guides governing aspirations for an experience of the discovery of Canada, an ambience or relational atmosphere for heritage and landscape comes first as objective.

The guide must teach others from the student travellers entry level for Canadian heritage and bush. It is an entry point that is largely ignorant of Canada's travel heritage, fearful of the bush with the central motive being an escape from the business of city life. The guides role is to set the ambience so that ignorance of Canada becomes understanding, terror of bush becomes respect for "home", space — something to get through to new space — becomes "place" where the self is seen as identified to setting. Or as novelist David James Duncan writes, "it *e*volves as the native [being] *in*volves himself in his region."[21] Finally one's perceived escape is less a focus than what one is actually going to, a "surfacing" — actually *to* some place, rather than escaping *from* some place. The entry now is one of dialectic responsibility. With success (credit largely the pull of the bush itself) comes disorientation or a decontextualization. And with this comes the beginnings of genuine questioning of self in environment, self to other cultures and ancestors and the possibility of a "look again, it's not the way you thought it was" moment. With this comes a rolling out of a new "map" with unknown indentations.

Beyond the need for direct experience and the importance of a heritage derived ambience, there are the specifics of how to inspire water travel as the discovery of Canada. How does this ambience take shape? The specifics are best summed up with the idea that you must go there with "your feet on the ground and head in the clouds".[22]

For "feet on the ground", guided travel is best in small groups (nine to a party max). The circuit route carries with it the significance of return to one's starting point so is preferred to the linear routing metaphorically. It is best not to build up point to point highlight destinations. The trip; the whole route, is the experience. The travel is arduous enough to get the feel of "animal lazy", a solid fatigue, but there must be time for campfire, for side trips, to explore relics and old clearings. Basically, the guide sets the stage for big days of "on the water" travel with short stays at campsites. Participants must get dirty, lost, tired, hungry. But they also experience sunrise, beauty, campfire glow, end of portage elation; in short - full experience with the land so that they learn to firmly plant their feet on the ground. By end of the day they come to "piss hardy" as so eloquently put by the late Edward Abbey.[23]

The guide compliments the physical/spiritual activity with readings or ideas/stories of the past. Examples of these would be, Grey Owls' Keepers of the Trail passage, Sigurd Olson's reflections on losing one's grip of time, arctic explorer George Back's 1836 "Starting out on a voyage" passage and David Thompson, on instinct and native spirit world.[24] These examples are selected to keep peoples "heads in the clouds". They are meant to spark - to take fire. Where the spark goes is up to the student. If the moment is not right, a reading is not shared. This practice should not be contrived ambience. Stories such as the mystery of Tom Thomson, the life of Etienne Brule, Eskimo Charlie's trip from Brochet in Northern Manitoba to New Orleans; these are told to fill the land with its spirits.[25] Stories both specific to the particular route and general ones to comparable Canadian landscape can be told.

The route ideally is dotted with old cabins-trappers tilts, old trails logging relics, pictograph sites, all for story and ripe for interpretation. The specific site helps the immediacy of the feet on the ground, head in the clouds aim.

In thinking of the overall travel design, it must be remembered that in most of Canada, certainly for all of the Canadian Shield landscape, the canoe and snowshoe alone best bring the ties to the past. In parts of the north, the dog team wins the day and in the Rockies and areas west, the horseback packing outfitter trip dominated early travel. To interweave tradition with the present, the traveller must be true to some of these traditions in both travel design and equipment. The smell of the saddle blankets (don't replace old ones), the feel of the tumpline and canvas pack (don't opt for cordura nylon and webbing), the fit of the wood canvas canoe, the campfire over the portable gas stove; this attention to the activity's feeling of timelessness spurs on a continuity with time. The travel, again, as David James Duncan suggests, evolves with place and mode as traveller involves with tradition.

The pedagogy for water travel as the discovery of Canada involves roots, spirit and imagination. Roots refers to the telling and living of the stories of the Canadian bush. It is a most interdisciplinary task. Spirit is concern for the fundamental nature of one's inquiry, their ontological framework which must be open to other cultural assumptions and practices. Romantic poet John Keats thought of this quality of spirit as "negative capability" and wrote to his brothers in 1817,

> Several things dovetailed in my mind and at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of achievement...I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.[26]

Finally, imagination is the quality of mind one must not only tap, but one must consciously think to advance. As poet Wallace Stevens wrote, "We have it (imagination), because we do not have enough without it".[27] We must come to perceive beyond our own limited frame of reference so that both our awareness as historical and ecological beings comes to flourish.

With attention to roots, spirit and imagination, the guide can help participants, and in fact, help him or herself, roll out a new map with welcoming routes each with many unknown indentations. We can come to find the so called "New World" that both baffled and was ignored by so many Euro-Canadian ancestors. "Where is here" awaits our discovery.

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